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SHORT PAPERS ON THE IRISH CHURCH QUESTION.

No. VIII.

EARL RUSSELL ON THE RESULT OF IRISH CHURCH DIS-ESTABLISHMENT.

“In Ireland not only is there a vast proportion of the property, but also a vast proportion of members of the learned professions, and of others whose importance cannot be denied, who are attached to the Protestant Church, *and by whom any thing that could be considered as at all tending to overturn the Established Church would be looked upon as placing them in a state of political inferiority to their fellow-countrymen.* And, besides this, we may recollect that the Act of Union made the Irish Church Establishment a part of the Church Establishment of England. From these considerations, Sir, I cannot but come to the conclusion that any measure involving the destruction of that Church would involve a breach in the Act of Union; *endangering the integrity of the empire in the first place*, and in the second place, considering how many years have elapsed since the Act of Union has passed into the law of the land, probably occasioning such a rent in the whole ecclesiastical constitution of these realms, *that I think the Church of England would suffer deeply from such a measure.*”—*Speech of EARL RUSSELL, May 14, 1838 (Hansard, 3rd Series, vol. xlii. p. 1178).*

The results of dis-establishing the Irish Church, so pithily described by Earl Russell in the above words, are worthy of especial attention at the present crisis.

Earl Russell, when he made the speech referred to, was a responsible Minister of the Crown. He held at that time the distinguished post of Secretary of State for the Home Department in Lord Melbourne's administration; and he then told the people of England that the results of overturning the Established Church in Ireland would be *threefold*, viz.:—

- (1.) It would place the Churchmen of Ireland in a state of political inferiority to their fellow-countrymen.
- (2.) It would involve a breach in the Act of Union, and endanger the integrity of the Empire.

- (3.) It would probably occasion such a *rent* in the whole ecclesiastical constitution of this realm as to cause the Church in England *to suffer deeply from such a measure.*

Lord Russell, no longer afflicted with official responsibility, has changed his opinions on the Irish Church. But this change in Lord Russell does not in the least change the actual facts of the case, or the results that will flow from the dis-establishment of the Church in Ireland. They remain the same as before. Nothing has occurred to alter them. If the overthrow of the Established Church in Ireland in 1838 would then have placed the Irish Churchmen in a state of political inferiority to their fellow-countrymen, the same result will follow in 1868; if their dis-establishment "involved a breach in the Act of Union, and endangered the integrity of the Empire," it even more does so now; if then such a measure would "occasion a rent in the whole ecclesiastical constitution of these realms," it would equally do so now. Instead of the comparatively calm atmosphere of 1838, we are living in the midst of the political tempest of 1868; and the Irish Church is in danger of being sacrificed to a party cry, when the vast importance of the interests involved should place it above all party. We trust those moderate men who are inclined to agree with Lord Russell in his present political creed, will calmly weigh the full meaning of his important declaration of 1838. The Irish Church is but a very small portion of the vast question on the consideration of which England has now entered. The *Nonconformist* has already warned its friends that "The Irish Church question will not be finally disposed of before the public mind will be prepared to entertain proposals in reference to the Scottish Kirk and the Church of England. *As it has been with one Establishment, so probably will it be with the others.* Their time is fixed. *Mr. Gladstone is but now treading on the verge of a wide region of change.* He knows not whither his convictions will ultimately impel him. He may be regarded as raised up and qualified by Divine Providence for great and beneficent purposes." Let, then, the Clergy and Laity of England look plainly at the real battle that is before them. The Irish Church is a very small matter in the eye of the Liberation Society and its allies. It is the first attacked, because it is the weakest; but it is only the first. Should English Churchmen (for with them the issue really rests) permit the Irish Church to be dis-established, they will have allowed principles of Parliamentary legislation to have been laid down which will pave the way for the advance of the enemy to the very heart of their

own citadel. It is assumed as an axiom by those Churchmen who are inclined to favour a separation of Church and State, that a Church free from the trammels of the State is a necessary consequence of dis-estbalishment. But this by no means follows as a certain consequence. We have already had hints of the great danger "of creating, in cool blood, a formidable *imperium in imperio*." The leading journal has already warned us that it is quite possible for the Church to be dis-established and robbed of its endowments, and yet for the Crown to retain the nomination to its bishoprics and deaneries. Let us then be wise in time. Let us consider well *where* the destruction of the Irish Establishment will finally land us. Let us remember the immense danger of removing the only organization which can prevent Rome from becoming politically, as well as religiously, supreme in Ireland. Let us also, each individually, consider our duty as members of Christ's Church, to stand by our brethren "of like faith" in Ireland, who are one with us in Creed, and Liturgy, and Articles—one with us "in the confession of the same Christian faith, and in the doctrine of the Sacraments." (1st Irish Canon of 1634, still in force.)

(From preface to 46th thousand of Rev. Dr. Alfred T. Lee's "Facts respecting the present state of the Church in Ireland.")

The national religion preserved by Establishment.

We know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal ; that Atheism is against not only our religion but our instincts, and that it cannot prevail long. But if in the moment of riot, and in a drunken delirium from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembic of hell, which in France is now so furiously boiling, we should uncover our nakedness by throwing off that Christian religion which has hitherto been our boast, our comfort, and our great source of civilisation amongst us, and among many other nations, we are apprehensive (being well aware that the mind will not endure a void) that some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition might take place of it.

For that reason, before we take from our Establishment this natural human means of estimation, and give it up to contempt, as you have done, and in so doing it have incurred the penalties

you will deserve to suffer, we desire that some other may be presented to us in the place of it. We shall then form our judgment.

On these ideas, instead of quarrelling with Establishment, as some do, who have made a philosophy and a religion of their hostility to such institutions, *we cleave closely to them*. We are resolved to keep an Established Church and Established Monarchy; an established aristocracy and an established democracy; each in the degree it exists, and in no greater.—*Edmund Burke, Reflections on the French Revolution, page 73.*

Mr. Gladstone on the Christian responsibility of public men.

“An answer should, if possible, be made ready in the conscience of each man who is called to act in public trusts to the question, If it be or be not the manifest ordinance of Almighty God that government should bear duties towards religion, Christian governments towards the Christian Church? As was said of old, ‘If the Lord be God serve Him: but if Baal, then serve him;’ so it should even be said to the English people. If there be no conscience, no form of religious discernment in well ordered states, and if unity in the body be no law of the Church, let us freely abandon the ancient policy under which this land has consolidated her strength, and sustained her happiness, and carried a fame yet wider than the dominions that are washed by every sea; but if the reverse of both these propositions be true, then let us decline to purchase moral debility and death, wrapped in this disguise, and entitled peace; then, in the sacred name of God, to the utmost and to the last of our power, let us steadily abide by the noble tradition of our fathers, and be faithful to posterity, even as antiquity has been faithful towards us.”—*Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone on Church and State.*

Average size of an Irish benefice, 20 square miles.

Average Church population, 459.

Average income of Incumbent, £245.

There is only one benefice in Ireland, and that peculiarly situated, in which there is no Church population.







